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ABSTRACT

A discussion of authentic instructional materials for the business German classroom examines the reasons for using such materials, and focuses on reading strategies to be used with authentic German texts. Authentic materials' advantages include their communicative function, their intended use by a real audience, and their specific form. It is proposed that authentic materials can be adapted for instructional use without compromising these advantages. A 5-stage reading process that draws on schema theory to help students attain global proficiency is applied to the use of authentic materials. The stages include: (1) preteaching/preparation; (2) skimming and scanning; (3) decoding/intensive reading; (4) comprehension check; (5) and transferable/integrating skills. Variations of some aspects of the model are also discussed. (MSE)

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# Authentic Materials for the Business German Classroom

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# AUTHENTIC MATERIALS FOR THE BUSINESS GERMAN CLASSROOM

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The Goethe Institute has been sponsoring Produktionsseminare in the United States since 1984. During the summer of 1987, however, the first Erlebte Landeskunde-Wirtschaft Seminar was held in Düsseldorf, Federal Republic of Germany. During this two-week seminar, participants observed first hand individual businesses as well as other institutions related to the West German business scene and, more importantly, gathered authentic materials on location. In the follow-up seminar held in Chicago in March 1988, American participants of the Düsseldorf seminar developed some authentic materials collected in Düsseldorf and the Ruhr Industrial District into instructional units for the Business German classroom.[1] As a leader (Karottki) and a participant (Denk) at both seminars, the presenters can offer insights into problems frequently encountered while preparing authentic materials for use in the Business German classroom. The presentation is divided into two sections. The first section (Denk) discusses reasons for using authentic materials and focuses on reading strategies to be used in conjunction with authentic German business texts. The second section (Karottki) illustrates common pitfalls encountered in developing exercises designed to enhance student access to authentic materials.[2]

As Rusterholz points out in her article, the major emphasis in Business Foreign Language courses was initially placed on

business writing skills; and although the focus has changed recently to speaking and listening skills, the reading skill has remained neglected for the most part (427). Frequently, the reading selections included in textbooks are written specifically for Americans by Americans. Many experts, however, argue for "the use of authentic language in instructional materials wherever and whenever possible" (Omaggio 47; also Edelhoff and Neuner 25). This does not mean, however, that the authentic materials can not or should not be prepared for instructional use. Neuner specifies three characteristics of authentic texts: 1. they always have a communicative function, 2. they are addressed to a real audience, and 3. they have a specific form, e.g. a newspaper article or a news report (25). The contexts for Business Foreign Language practice should be derived as much as possible from culturally authentic sources. The use of newspaper or magazine articles, press releases, annual reports, etc. will acquaint students more directly with real language than any set of contrived classroom materials used alone; and students enroll in our Business German classrooms for instruction to prepare themselves for the real world.

Omaggio cites two main reasons given by reading specialists for the use of authentic reading materials: 1. Simplifying a text often removes the natural redundancy found in authentic reading selections and thus changes the text's rhetorical organization to some extent. This tampering with the text may indeed make the text more difficult to read, comprehend, and discuss than the

original. 2. The difficulty of a reading exercise and a typical reading assignment is not necessarily a function of the text to be read as it is a function of whatever type of task or activity we expect of our students as they attempt to comprehend the reading text. Therefore, we should consider adjusting the task, and not the reading passage, when we design reading comprehension activities (152). Materials selected should be appropriate in form and content to student proficiency levels as well as their fields of interest. Furthermore, the tasks that students are asked to perform with the materials presented to them must also be geared to their proficiency level.

June Phillips described a five-stage process that she developed so that students, i.e. readers of texts, can attain a global reading proficiency: 1. preteaching/preparation stage, 2. skimming and scanning stages, 3. decoding/intensive reading stage, 4. comprehension check, and 5. transferable/integrating skills (289).

1. Preteaching/preparation stage. This stage is based on the premise that what the reader brings to the text is of primary importance in comprehending it. Furthermore, anticipation and prediction are highly desirable, indeed necessary, skills for reading. Students should build up expectancies for the material about to be read. In the real world, reading expectations are built into situations; when I look at the MLA Job List, I seek out key words such as "Business German" or "Coordinator" or "Twentieth Century." In second language situations, expectations

are not quite so forthcoming. Frequently, students look at a title of a text and are relieved when they have translated the title correctly, and then sigh when they discover that there are six more pages to "translate."

Schema theory tells us that a text does not carry meaning by itself and that we bring our knowledge of the world to the text. The background knowledge that we as readers possess is organized into structures called schemata. It is important to activate these schemata so that information from reading selections can be incorporated into existing schemata. Second language learners can experience distortions in comprehension not only because of misinterpretations of linguistic elements in the message, but also because of a misinterpretation of a schema, activated due to cultural bias. Classroom activities designed to promote student predictive skills include: 1. brainstorming to highlight vocabulary or to generate ideas with a high probability of appearing in the text; 2. reading accompanying contextual information such as visuals, titles, headlines, descriptive statements with pictures, charts, maps (i.e. visual organizers and other script activators); 3. determining sequence or reviewing with a continuing narrative; and 4. pure prediction where students hypothesize about the significance of a title or anticipate the completion of the first line. Edelhoff provides a number of suggestions that can be done in either native or target language: 1. ask students what <u>they</u> know about a particular topic; 2. introduce fundamental concepts of the reading passage;

3. clear up essential words and phrases, especially those that could not be guessed from context, e.g. names or other cultural information necessary to understanding the reading passage; and/or 4. paraphrasing the content in simpler words by the instructor. However diverse the prereading activities, the goal is to provide or supplement background information and thus to make the text more accessible to students. All parts of the process should lead the learner to the point where the learner can communicate on his or her own in the target language.

2. Skimming/scanning stages. Though skimming (getting the gist) and scanning (locating specific information) are distinct processes to be practiced individually, Phillips maintains that skillful readers in real world situations do scan while they skim. Phillips suggests some of the following activities for students to practice at this stage: 1. getting the gist of short readings, paragraphs, or authentic materials; 2. identifying topic sentences or main ideas; 3. selecting the best paraphrase from multiple-choice options of the main idea of a text or of its conclusion; 4. matching subtitles with paragraphs; 5. filling in chars or forms with key concepts; 6. creating titles or headlines for reading selections; and 7. making judgments about or reacting to reading passages (290). Scanning goes a step further than skimming, as readers located more specific detail requiring additional amount of comprehension. When planning scanning exercises for use with authentic materials, one

can also accommodate students working with different reading selections.

Janet Swaffar argues, however, that students should move directly from skimming to scanning. Students are asked to skim a passage to determine whether the text deals with problems, people or organizations, events or ideas. Then students/readers move on to scan the passage more carefully and to identify the main problems, ideas, etc. presented in the text. An important implication of Swaffar's process is the potential internalization of this reading process so that readers maintain this procedure even in out-of-class reading situations.

In her introduction to Mosaik: Deutsche Kultur Claire Kramsch argues for a separation of skimming and scanning. She suggests to students that they read a given text twice. During the first reading she encourages students to "focus on what does make sense (cognates, compound words, logical relationships between words and whole phrases) and skip what you don't understand" (3). The second reading will then provide students with a better feel for the content; however, during the second and third reading of a ext students will already by scanning for specific informational items. Some activities recommended to practice scanning are: 1. listing and connecting information found in the text; 2. reading with a specific purpose or goal in mind; 3. targeting specific information for students to find while reading a text; 4. providing a logical or chronological sequence of informational pieces; 5. categorizing information in

an outline, a diagram, or another schematical representation where students fill in various missing elements; and 6. matching informational items from two columns.

3. Decoding/intensive reading stage. At this stage the assignment of meaning in a detailed and informative way becomes the main task; decoding is the key process for intensive reading. As long as readers are still "learning to read" as opposed to "reading to learn," decoding will be necessary because many items in the reading passage will be either unrecognizable or unknown. The amount of decoding should be reduced because of the preparatory work that students/readers have completed, viz. prereading activities, skimming, and scanning. Decoding involves guessing from context the meaning of unknown words or phrases and may be needed at the word, phrase, or discourse level. Readers need to be taught not only how to guess the meaning of content words, but also how to interpret the force of connectors, determine the relationships among sentences or sentence elements, and the like. As Phillips concludes, "The aim of instruction is not solely the explication of a particular passage but also the demonstration of a process to students; in the final analysis, conscious, detailed decoding is not a common goal of reading. Fluency and rapid understanding are the desired objectives" (293). Only when comprehension is impeded by unknown words, complex structures, or very unfamiliar concepts do skilled readers resort to decoding.

4. Comprehension stage. Phillips states that reading comprehension exercises should: 1. not confound the reading skill with other skills, especially the productive skills (speaking and writing) and 2. that reading comprehension checks should project the reader through several phases of the reading process (293). If comprehension is to be checked in the students' native language, students can be asked about main ideas of the text, supporting details, elements of the argument, inferences about the attitude or purpose of the writer, or an evaluation of the authenticity of the information conveyed in the text. If comprehension is to be checked in German, remaining in the reading mode has the advantage of allowing for a rearrangement of ideas based on lexical substitution, syntactical rewordings or logical paraphrases. Thus true/false statements or variations of true/false statements such as forced choice or adding a "no-information given" category may be used as well as multiple choice or completion exercises.

5. Transferable/integrating skills. Phillips argues that the final stage should go beyond the individual features of a text and focus on reading strategies per se so that these strategies may be employed by readers when they next read a text in or outside of the classroom. Exercises especially useful in this stage are: 1. exercises that encourage contextual guessing; 2. selective reading for main ideas; 3. activities to promote appropriate dictionary usage; and 4. effective re-reading strategies to confirm or to disprove hypotheses that may have

been formulated during the previous stages. Rusterholz suggests a further post-reading activity that is also designed to help students the reason for reading a particular text, viz. "to move beyond the immediate parameters of the text to apply the reading to a realistic situation in the business context" (433).

Now, my friend and colleague, Hartmut Karottki, will provide hands-on examples that illustrate common pitfalls encountered in developing such exercises designed to enhance student access to authentic materials in the Business German classroom.[3]

NOTES

1. Samples of authentic materials that have been prepared as instructional units for the Business German classroom may be obtained by writing to Hartmut Karottki, Goethe Institute, 401 N. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL 60611.

2. The Karotkki segment of the presentation consisted of hands-on examples displayed via an overhead projector. For more information, please contact Hartmut Karottki, Goethe Institute, 401 N. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL 60611.

3. The Karotkki segment of the presentation consisted of hands-on examples displayed via an overhead projector. For more information, please contact Hartmut Karottki, Goethe Institute, 401 N. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL 60611.

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